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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON SITUATION IN THE EAST AND CONCERNS OVER HAMESH KOREIB

REF: A) ASMARA 552, B) ASMARA 543, C) ASMARA 514

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The UN and international partners are optimistic following the conclusion of the first round of talks in Asmara between the Eastern Front and Sudanese Government under Eritrean mediation. The signing of the Declaration of Principles and Cessation of Hostilities agreement were good first steps; the parties agreed to reconvene on July 17, though the date may be pushed to late July. A matter of some concern to our international partners is the exclusion of international observers during the first round. As noted in reftels, the Sudanese Government was forceful in its desire to not permit outside participation or observation in the talks, and Eritrea appears to have convinced the Eastern Front to accept this position. Both sides have, however, said there is room for technical assistance to contribute to a consultative mechanism. The lack of observers in the talks in Asmara may be less worrisome, however, than the absence of international observers in Hamesh Koreib. The UN has lost all access to the area, and concern is rising that retributive attacks may be occurring. END SUMMARY.

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"Friends of the Mediation" to Provide Tech Assistance  
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12. (SBU) Pol Officer recently participated in a small group discussion on developments in Eastern Sudan involving representatives from UNMIS, OCHA, the UK, Norway, the Netherlands, and Canada. In spite of the decision not to permit third party observers into the talks, Eritrea has expressed support for the creation of a "Friends of the Mediation" group, which would provide ad hoc technical assistance. In particular, there is a growing consensus that a consultative component is vital to success of the talks. The parties appear to agree that dialogue within affected communities is necessary prior to the signing of an agreement. A meeting took place in Tesseney, Eritrea, during the first week of July to discuss standing up and funding this consultative mechanism.

Some members of the donor community, including the Norwegians and British, have said they plan to attend. Though the parties would not pose any objection to international funding for the consultations, this will not likely provoke movement on their unwillingness to allow third-party observers to the talks.

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UN: Situation in Hamesh Koreib Remains Tenuous  
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13. (SBU) Separately, indications are the situation in Eastern Sudan may be more tenuous than is apparent from media reports. The recent withdrawal of SPLA forces from Hamesh Koreib and turnover to Kassala State authorities was met with positive reactions from the international community, UN, and media, but since that time there has been very little information emerging from the town. UNMIS is increasingly concerned the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) may move into Hamesh Koreib soon and the absence of observers may permit targeting of civilians. Though UNMIS, other UN agencies, and NGOs previously had obtained greater freedom of movement in the East for the

delivery of humanitarian supplies, the Sudanese Government has recently re-imposed travel restrictions, including on WFP. This has blocked most travel outside Port Sudan and Kassala. Prior to the restrictions, WFP had delivered sufficient supplies to areas outside these cities for one month, but supplies will run out in the near future.

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Hamesh Koreib a SAF "Area of Operations"  
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14. (SBU) The only recent visit to Hamesh Koreib was by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which reported that the town has been declared an "Area of Operations" by the SAF. The issue is further complicated by allegations that approximately 3,000 SPLA "deserters" remain in the vicinity, and were not part of the general withdrawal.

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